

26 August, 2016

Mr Maman Sidikou
United Nations Special Representative to the Secretary General
Democratic Republic of Congo

Dear Mr. Maman Sidikou,

We are writing to share our concerns about the security situation in Beni town and across the territory, and our recommendations as to how MONUSCO can reinforce protection of civilians there.

On Saturday, 13 August as many as 50 confirmed people were massacred by unknown assailants in the city of Beni, Eastern DRC.¹ Twenty-eight people were kidnapped, including 18 children. This massacre is part of an unacceptable pattern that has seen the death of some 700 men, women and children and the displacement of some 200,000 since October 2014.² Beni Civil Society has put the number much higher, and estimates that some 1200 people have been killed over the course of two years.

Since the first verified killings on 2 October 2014, there have been some 107 group killings ranging from 1 individual death to the butchery of 120 men women and children, often by machete.³ These events raise serious concerns regarding MONUSCO's response and its ability to fulfil its mandate to protect civilians.

The INGOs signatory to this letter see following gaps in response:

- **Lack of community access to MONUSCO:** Communities regularly cite that they do not know who to contact in MONUSCO for help, and despite being the second massacre to occur within Beni town, there is no established community alert network. FARDC commanders in the area informed NGOs and civil society that the shots heard around 19h30 were the result of fighting between moto-drivers.⁴ Although done to prevent panic, such misinformation stalled the timely deployment of MONUSCO to the area, particularly as they were unable to cross check it via direct consultations with communities.
- **Lack of knowledge on perpetrators:** The violence in the Grand Nord is allegedly committed by a mix of armed elements, including ADF, Mai-Mai groups, and some elements of the FARDC.⁵ Yet understanding the relationships between the groups, and motivations for the attacks remains unclear. Better knowledge on the existing networks of violence is absolutely critical to tailoring appropriate response.
- **Lack of contingency planning:** The current attack against civilians is rumored to be in response to a FARDC attack on an ADF base in Mwaliki at the end of July. Although this was not a joint operation, Resolution 2277 commits MONUSCO to "mitigating the risk to civilians before, during and after any military operation."⁶ Contingency planning should extend beyond the immediate fallout of armed action.

¹ The true number of deaths remains unknown as many of them were dropped in Semliki river. There are some 120 victims according to the Red Cross local service.

² Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (23 May 2016)

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http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/466 (last accessed 15 August 2016)

³ Ibid.

⁴ Based on interviews on 15 August 2016 with three INGOs based in Beni Town

⁵ Stearns, Jason (2016) 'Report: Who are the Killers of Beni' <http://congoresearchgroup.org/report-who-are-the-killers-of-beni/> (last accessed 15 August 2015)

⁶ S/RES/2277 (2016), "Resolution 2227: 2016" Section I: Protection of Civilians, Paragraph D.

http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2277.pdf (last accessed 18 August 2016)

With the two-year anniversary of the first attack fast approaching, a comprehensive long-term response needs to be developed now, particularly in light of escalating violence around an uncertain electoral period.

We therefore urgently recommend the following:

Recommendations:

- To call for a general strengthening of MONUSCO civilian presence through-out Beni territory with an emphasis on communicating and listening to communities, and investing the resources to do so. Practically this should include:
 - Increase regular consultation and communication with communities in Beni. Consultations should identify ways to improve security and mitigate protection risks, particularly concerning children. and be done through increased permanent presence of civilian staff in Beni, and increased presence of Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs) – emphasizing the deployment of more female CLAs.
 - The establishment of an early warning system in Beni, using best practice from MONUSCO’s Community Alert Networks, enabling community members to directly raise alerts with MONUSCO. The system needs to be monitored and regular feedback provided to the community.
 - Establishing a permanent MONUSCO Joint Mission Analysis Cell in Beni Town to develop a more nuanced understanding of the factors and motivations of the various armed actors in the Grand Nord. If such an assessment gathers credible evidence of crimes, perpetrators should be brought to justice,
 - Enhancing the accountability toward populations by launching a formal investigation as to when and in what format MONUSCO receive alerts on the massacres in Beni territory, and to act on these findings. While it is true that MONUSCO receives many false alerts,, those receiving them should be trained in verification procedures to ensure that they are only dismissed after proper follow-up. The results of the investigation should be reported publically, including the limits of existing structures, resources and mandate.

- To push the DRC government to develop a security plan for the Beni region that involves local communities and MONUSCO in coordination with the Stabilization and Reconstruction Plan For Eastern DRC (STAREC), as per the I4S strategy and provincial stabilization plan.

- To encourage the DRC government to keep leading an investigation on the Beni massacres since 2014 in the most transparent way possible no matter how sensitive the findings. The findings should be made public and those found guilty should be prosecuted in order to give the Beni population a sense of justice.

We thank you for your consideration and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with your further.

Sincerely,

